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JERRY BRADY OF ILWU LOCAL 63, PCPA

INTERVIEWEE: JERRY BRADY

INTERVIEWERS: HARVEY SCHWARTZ

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[00:00:00] **HARVEY SCHWARTZ:** Jerry could you tell me your name, your date of birth, where you were born, when you were born, and what local?

[00:00:23] **JERRY BRADY:** My name is Jerry Brady. I was born in Grass Valley, California, April 7, 1934. I was in Local 63 for 35 years and I total of about 44 years working on the waterfront. And I'm right now with the pensioners group in southern California and on the executive board of that group.

[00:00:53] **HARVEY:** Tell me a little bit, if you would, about your early life, your youth, your early experiences

before you got into ILWU.

[00:01:01] **JERRY:** Just before getting on the ILWU I worked for Shell Chemical for ten years. I was very active in the OCAW union, which was—our little plant was 100 percent and very active. Matter of fact, I clashed quite a bit with the company and I was the secretary of the group for several years and, on that committee. It kind of— pretty soon I just gave up the ghost and went down the waterfront to work.

[00:01:38] **HARVEY:** How did you get from Grass Valley to that company?

[00:01:42] **JERRY:** I got from there well, I went in the army in '54, got out in '55 and went to Oregon and worked with my brother Ken, he drove Cat [Caterpillar machinery] and I set [logging] chokers behind him. I worked up there out of Glendale, Oregon for a year, and then that closed down. When the woods closed down in Oregon, it closes down. And so, I had two brothers in southern California. Matter of fact they were just both going into the longshore union, one in the clerks union—one in 63, one in Local 13. And I came down here and they helped me—matter of fact, one got me in the job at Shell, helped me get the job at Shell and then ten years later the other one helped me get into the clerks union and I went into the clerks union in 1968.

[00:02:28] **HARVEY:** How did he help you get in?

[00:02:30] **JERRY:** He helped me with a test, very extensively with the test. And he helped me as far as different people to meet. Mostly, it was to get on the list for the test, and exactly how he did that I don't know.

[00:02:53] **HARVEY:** Were your brothers union guys too?

[00:02:55] **JERRY:** Yeah, both of them. You bet. My brother Raymond was in the union clerk in 63. And my brother Chuck was in Local 13.

[00:03:06] **HARVEY:** How about your parents? Were they union activists?

[00:03:09] **JERRY:** No, my father was a gold miner. He mined gold for 55 years in northern California. And then he was, at 67, he took a job with a county and worked in the county road for another almost 20 years.

[00:03:26] **HARVEY:** Okay, so you're down in southern Cal and you get in 1968. Did you know much about the ILWU before that?

[00:03:34] **JERRY:** No. Yes, well, actually my brother Chuck worked in Stockton [California] for three years after he got out of high school in '49. And he talked a lot about working on ships and Harry Bridges and different things. So I did know a little bit about it.

[00:03:52] **HARVEY:** How did you view it?

[00:03:53] **JERRY:** Oh, I thought it would be a pretty nifty place to work myself. I never thought too much about it until I moved to southern California.

[00:04:03] **HARVEY:** Tell me about your first day on the job, particularly as a clerk. You come in as a

clerk--actually you didn't do longshore as such.

[00:04:36] **JERRY:** No. Actually I did longshore when I first got to southern California for the first six months out of the employment office and then my brother got me the white card, which it gave me permission to get the extra jobs for the clerks hall. And my first day in the job in the clerk's hall was—

[00:04:36] **HARVEY:** Why don't you tell us your first day on the waterfront as working as a longshoreman?

[00:04:38] **JERRY:** Okay. My first day working as a longshoreman? I drove forklift. We were picking up sacks with a forklift and drive them to the hook. And I remember dropping these bags, I tried to go too fast and I kept dropping the bags and these longshoremen were very nice to me, kept putting the bags back on my [?pelleport?] . It was interesting.

[00:05:05] **HARVEY:** How can you drive a forklift on the first day? Usually that doesn't happen 'til you been around a while.

[00:05:10] **JERRY:** It was the extra job. That's what it was, it was the forklift job. 'Course I knew how to drive a forklift but it's just that I never worked on the waterfront.

[00:05:20] **HARVEY:** Where'd you learn how to drive a forklift?

[00:05:22] **JERRY:** Oh in lumber companies in northern California.

[00:05:27] **HARVEY:** How about your first day clerking?

[00:05:28] **JERRY:** My first day clerking. . .

[00:05:30] **HARVEY:** Before you do that let me ask you, were there any hard products you ever worked when you were doing longshore work that six-month period? Miserable? Did you work hides or something like it?

[00:05:39] **JERRY:** Well we used to work hides and just kind of on a clean-up thing. But most of it we worked were nitrates. Restack nitrates and stuff like that as a cooper. We did the re-coopering work—that was pretty tedious jobs. We used to stack lead ingots and things like that. It was pretty demanding work, physically.

[00:06:08] **HARVEY:** How so, can you describe it?

[00:06:11] **JERRY:** Just ingots were heavy, very heavy, and you just had to stack them up and band them. And then, of course we would handle cotton and we would take all the bales, we'd have to roll them over, stand them up, band them and then put them on big—and load them into the ships sometimes, six or more at a time. The bales of cotton.

[00:06:37] **HARVEY:** Was it pleasant work?

[00:06:38] **JERRY:** Pleasant work? It was demanding but it was interesting.

[00:06:51] **HARVEY:** You understand when I say something like that I'm trying to elicit a response, of some

sort. Was it positive or negative?

[00:07:01] **JERRY:** Say that again.

[00:07:02] **HARVEY:** Oh, when I'm asking you a question like was it pleasant work, I'm eliciting a response, maybe you think it was, maybe you think it wasn't...

[00:07:10] **JERRY:** I would say that most of my work down there was always pleasant, whether it was a hard job or not. The waterfront wasn't really the hard—to me it wasn't the hardest place to work. I've worked harder jobs in the lumber companies and even in Shell, handling 500 pound drums. You know, that was a hard job.

[00:07:33] **HARVEY:** What'd you do handling those drums? Why were you handling them?

[00:07:35] **JERRY:** Oh we had to move them from place to place. They would load the drums and they needed the area to load more drums, so we would go ahead and roll the drums so sometimes we had to roll them to a pallet board or to a different area. It was a one-man job. You'd break the drum and roll it by yourself to where it was going.

[00:08:02] **HARVEY:** Tell me about your first day on the job as a clerk in '68?

[00:08:07] **JERRY:** Yes. That was at Door 14, at the Matson Company, Berth 198, Wilmington, [California] and I went to there and I ran into a man by the name of Morey Segal. And Morey Segal, I didn't realize was ending his—he was a B-man in the union but his career was ending because he was going into the real estate business. Of course, Morey got into the real estate business and did just fabulous in the real estate business in San Pedro.

[00:08:41] **HARVEY:** What was work like the first day? If you can remember?

[00:08:46] **JERRY:** Oh, just nice and easy. Standing at the end of the truck, checking cargo into the truck as the truck driver loaded it. You hardly worked more than two, three trucks a day. Back in the loadings, you had to load the whole truck sometimes it took several hours to do that.

[00:09:06] **HARVEY:** Do you have anything to add about working cargos? Good cargos? Pleasant cargos? Unpleasant cargos? Hard work? Easy? Anything to add on?

[00:09:15] **JERRY:** Yeah well, cargo as a clerk?

[00:09:21] **HARVEY:** Yeah.

[00:09:21] **JERRY:** Okay, as a clerk. Yeah, I would say that working at the army dock whether it was banding—banding, tying motorcycles on racks. First we'd build the rack then we'd band the motorcycles on the rack so we could ship it overseas. It was a demanding job, sometimes you would band only two or three a day.

[00:09:50] **HARVEY:** I thought, would that be Local 13 work rather than Local 63?

[00:09:53] **JERRY:** No, because it was cooper work. It was considered cooper work and so the clerks did all the

re cooperative cargo.

[00:10:03] **HARVEY:** That's interesting. You had an active background as in having been involved in the old workers, I guess, did you get active in Local 63 at some point?

[00:10:15] **JERRY:** In politics? No.

[00:10:16] **HARVEY:** Union politics?

[00:10:17] **JERRY:** Nope. No sir.

[00:10:19] **HARVEY:** You ran for office?

[00:10:20] **JERRY:** No sir.

[00:10:20] **HARVEY:** Active on committees?

[00:10:21] **JERRY:** No sir. Nothing.

[00:10:23] **HARVEY:** Nothing.

[00:10:24] **JERRY:** I didn't do any of this extracurricular stuff until I retired. [smiles]

[00:10:29] **HARVEY:** Really! Interesting. What did you hear about the 1934 strike? Was there a discussion about it at some point? Did guys tell you about it?

[00:10:41] **JERRY:** Yes, of course I read many stories on it and you know, the story of—The Rose Story and different writers, and it's just to me—it's sad but glorious because of what the longshoreman won. And they won. That was a strike they won. It was written for them to win it and they did. It was fantastic, I think.

[00:11:16] **HARVEY:** Okay. There's a strike in 1971. You'd been in for three years, do you remember what you did during the strike?

[00:11:24] **JERRY:** Yes, I was full picket duty, Berth 146 Wilmington [California].

[00:11:29] **HARVEY:** Do you remember much about it? Can you tell it to us?

[00:11:32] **JERRY:** Yes. Our picket duty there was just to watch at the gate there would generally be about six to ten of us there at the—and we had little shack there, a place to barbecue, a place for all our food, big Hawaiian man by the name of [?Soonac Wasimi?] would see me, came down and I would bring my ukulele and he'd play my ukulele and we had a big time. And when we'd get a little tired we'd have a football game out in the middle of the street. Just by the time everybody would get a little hungry, the bosses would come with their truck of food and give us food and drink. It was a fun time. And the nice thing about the '71, '72 strike is that almost everybody was well-heeled. I didn't know anybody that lost anything because of that strike.

[00:12:30] **HARVEY:** The bosses would come by with their food?

[00:12:31] **JERRY:** Oh yeah, with trucks of food.

[00:12:33] **HARVEY:** Which bosses were they?

[00:12:34] **JERRY:** Oh the bosses, they were collecting unemployment. Our bosses—yeah. Our bosses in Local 94, yeah. **HARVEY:** Okay.

Oh yeah, Jim North and those guys—sure.

[00:12:49] **HARVEY:** Well if your income had stopped at this time how did you get by economically?

[00:12:54] **JERRY:** Economically, I had a little money in the bank. I only used few hundred dollars of it. My wife at the time—this is my late wife—she was a beauty operator [waves hand around head] and she kept working. She worked through that and then I picked up a few extra jobs. I didn't work any jobs at all for about a month, then I had an opportunity to work at the army dock a day or two a week because it stayed open—the army dock stayed open so I worked there. Just enough to get by and you know, we didn't owe much, we had an \$83 payment on the house and a \$40 payment on the car. That was about it. So we managed.

[00:13:44] **HARVEY:** What about the 2002 lockout? If you look at Conor that's also good.

[00:13:49] **JERRY:** I just retired. I retired in August of 2002 and I went down and visited the picket line and I had torn my Achilles tendon and was on crutches or else I would've been—and I told my wife that I was going down and walk the picket. She said, "No you're not," because I was—two days after I got this cast on my foot and got the crutches I went down to visit them but then the next day I got in the car and drove to Denver, Colorado. So that was my lockout. I didn't know much about it.

[00:14:32] **HARVEY:** And when did you retire again?

[00:14:34] **JERRY:** August 1, 2002.

[00:14:38] **HARVEY:** And how old were you?

[00:14:40] **JERRY:** I was 68 years old.

[00:14:43] **HARVEY:** Okay, why did you decide to retire at that point? Some people stay longer?

[00:14:49] **JERRY:** Yeah I know, I could've too, I didn't. I don't know. I had a building I owned. I owned this apartment building in San Pedro and I had it on the market, and I told the wife, "If we sell this building I'm going to retire." And I sold it on day 25 of July and retired August the first.

[00:15:13] **HARVEY:** Were you active in writing and doing poetry all the way along? When did you start that?

[00:15:19] **JERRY:** I actually started writing poetry in the early nineteen-seventies. I wrote a little poem about the [Nevada County] Narrow Gauge Railroad that went from Colfax [California] to Nevada City [California]. 'Course it was a railroad I used to see when we used to drive to town we'd see the little train here and there and everywhere. And it was about the little towns of grass falling in Nevada City and the narrow gauge railroad and

that's the first poem of any consequence that I wrote. And then I would write a poem once in a while but I didn't really get into writing an awful lot until Al Perisho inspired me to write a little bit more and then he inspired me to chronicle them and put them in a book and so forth. And Al Perisho, was very instrumental in my feelings of unionism and the history and the whole thing. To me, he was just a great guy.

[00:16:16] **HARVEY:** Did Al get you involved in the Pensioners?

[00:16:32] **JERRY:** Yeah, he got me involved. He got me involved in the Pensioners. He got me involved in the executive board and he got me run for vice president and he wanted me to run for president but I declined. I thought, 'I'll let somebody else, like a younger guy, like Greg Mitre.' Matter of fact I stepped down from the vice president job so Greg [Mitre] could run for it.

[00:16:55] **HARVEY:** Is this on the San Pedro Southern California Pensioners or the whole thing? **JERRY:** The Southern California Pensioners.

Sounds wonderful. You know, sometimes when we do a wrap up we ask people to give us a kind of a looking back, 'what it all meant to me.' Can you do something like that? Or do you want to take your crack at that one?

[00:17:24] **JERRY:** What the whole union meant to me?

[00:17:26] **HARVEY:** Looking back at what all this experience meant to you. All your working and your union experience.

[00:17:32] **JERRY:** To me it meant a great way of life, more free—more freedom in my working years than I would've ever had anywhere else. It meant to me the security and safety that I had insurance from my family, that I had enough to provide my family, enough money to send my son to college, enough to put a few dollars away and look forward to retirement. And of course that's connected to what I did.

[00:18:07] **HARVEY:** Where did your son go to school?

[00:18:09] **JERRY:** He went to school at Santa Cruz at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

[00:18:17] **HARVEY:** You were able to put him through school without taking out loans?

[00:18:19] **JERRY:** Oh yes, no loans. No loans.

[00:18:23] **HARVEY:** Another era, huh?

[00:18:24] **JERRY:** Oh yes, that's right.

[00:18:28] **HARVEY:** Would you care to add anything? You've done a good job.

[00:18:32] **JERRY:** No, it's just that again, just saying about my poetry, I had no idea that I'd ever write as many poems as I have but to me it's—'course it's an education to me every time I write a poem because I have to get information enough to write about something and it kind of is like a synopsis of history, I mean it's—the poems.

[00:19:04] **HARVEY:** Yes. For the record, you've written a lot of material about the waterfront and that's part of the record.

[00:19:13] **JERRY:** Oh yes.

[00:19:16] **HARVEY:** Okay. Thank you very much.

[00:19:18] **JERRY:** You're welcome! Thank you very much!